

Film Monthly's REVIEWS

DAVID QUINLAN gives
his verdict on the
big screen version of a
cult Sixties TV series

● THE macabre madcaps who compose *The Addams Family* were first created by cartoonist Charles Addams in a series of strips for "The New Yorker" magazine. Their first live-action manifestation was in a popular TV series that started in 1964, at almost the same time as a similar programme *The Munsters*. Since then, both series have assumed cult status.

The composition of the family was still the same then as it is in the new film. Mother Morticia was beautiful but ghastly pale, husband Gomez had a passion for fencing and an interest in witchcraft. Bald Uncle Fester was known for his destructive instincts, the two children delighted in ghoulish games and playing in graveyards, and Lurch, the seven-foot-tall butler, was an emaciated version of Frankenstein's creature. Granny was both a witch and the family cook, offering a variety of stomach-squirming dishes from her cauldron.

It's 25 years since the TV series ended, but it's frequently been re-shown all over the world. The family's progress towards a movie



The Addams Family

version began five years ago, when producer Scott Rudin became re-acquainted with "The New Yorker" cartoons.

"The Addams material really captivated me," says Rudin, whose avowed aim for the movie was to reach as "closely as possible to the level of wit and sophistication that the Charles Addams cartoons embodied."

The elaborate settings of the Addams family's vast Victorian mansion, which rises 75 feet and has an underground river at its depth, are the work of production designer Rich-

ard MacDonald. Another key member of the team was Los Angeles chef Nina Solomon. She realised the unusual delicacies concocted by Granny: tentacle and grasshopper hors d'oeuvres, ostrich egg and yucca root appetisers, and ox-tail or two-headed pig for main courses.

An Addams Family 'rap' was also filmed, featuring recording star Hammer and the cast, which now features as the prologue to the film.

VERDICT

● THIS living horror comic *looks* great. Doubtless its cobwebs are the finest that money can buy. And here, too, is the familiar gallery of ghouls, led by Morticia (who else but Anjelica Huston?), a symphony in black, white and blood-red, matriarch to a Gothic family whose pet is Thing, a severed hand.

And yet, something is missing. Call it flair, imagination, or whatever magic ingredient is needed to make the Addamses (if they'll pardon the expression) spring to life.

A dance sequence at a party almost does it, but most of the characters stubbornly stay

cardboard comic cut-outs. Honourable exceptions are Christopher Lloyd as long-lost brother Fester, a shaven demon with a wonderful idiot grin; and Christina Ricci (Cher's younger daughter in *Mermaids*), a perfectly malevolent poker-faced child.

The dialogue is meticulously keyed to the Addams' love of the dark side of life. "Imagine if Fester did come back," muses Morticia's husband Gomez (Raul Julia), "half-human and a rotting shell." "Don't tease", she replies.

Big laughs, however, are notably missing, most gags are heavily staged, and the film remains a mildly diverting and expensive-looking walk on the weird side. ●

Producer
SCOTT RUDIN

Director
BARRY SONNENFELD

Screenplay
CAROLINE THOMPSON/
LARRY WILSON

Photography
OWEN ROIZMAN

Music
MARC SHAIMAN

101 Minutes - Certificate PG
(COLUMBIA/ORION)

Morticia ANJELICA HUSTON
Gomez RAUL JULIA
Fester/Gordon CHRISTOPHER LLOYD
Pugsley JIMMY WORKMAN
Wednesday CHRISTINA RICCI
Lurch CAREL STRUYCKEN
Granny JUDITH MALINA
Tulley DAN HEDAYA
Abigail ELIZABETH WILSON
Thing CHRISTOPHER HART



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